

**June 16th**

**Soweto Day**



## Part 1

# Historic Setting of June 16th

1948: Apartheid – Institutionalised racism, compulsory for all, introduced

1950: Communist Party banned

1953: **Bantu Education Act** established Black Education Department, set up to make apartheid permanent

1952: Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign (Defiance Campaign)

1955: Congress of the People (Kliptown) – adoption of the Freedom Charter

1956: Treason Trial

1960: Sharpeville Massacre, banning of PAC and ANC

1962: SACP, The Road to South African Freedom, issued (re-emergence of the SACP)

1960s: Independence of majority of African countries achieved

1963: Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, published in English

1967: Wankie and Sepolilo Campaigns – first campaigns of Umkhonto we Sizwe

1969: ANC, Morogoro Conference, Strategy and Tactics adopted

1972: Onkgopotse Tiro expelled from University of the North, leading to student protests

1973: Steve Biko banned

1975: Independence of Mozambique and Angola

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### **Bantu Education Act, 1953:**

A segregation law which legalised several aspects of the apartheid system. Its major provision was enforcing racially separated educational facilities.

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# Chaos and Cruelty in Schools

Because of the government's homelands policy, no new high schools were built in Soweto between 1962 and 1971.

But in the 1970s the state decided it needed better educated workers.

National enrolment of 178 959 in 1974 increased to 389 066 in 1976, a 140% increase in two years.

Between 1972 and 1974, 40 new schools were built in Soweto alone, and secondary enrolments grew from 12 656 to 34 656, a jump of nearly 300%.

School population increased more than the capacity of the schools to cope.

As a result of all of the above there was chaos and gross overcrowding, and stress on capacity of teachers to teach.

At the same time the government appointed Andries Treurnicht, ex-chairman of the Broederbond, and future founder, with Clive Derby-Lewis (the murderer of Chris Hani), of the Conservative Party, as Deputy Minister of Education.

1974: Treurnicht decrees that Afrikaans should be a medium of instruction in schools, 50:50 with English. Black African students are now required to have three languages, while white students only have to have one. Whites get free education; blacks have to pay.

1975: Government spent R644 a year on a white child's education but only R42 on a black child.

In 1975, the Bantu Education Department decided to reduce the number of school years from 13 to 12. Consequently, at the beginning of 1976, two years of students went up to Secondary School, at the same time.

In Soweto schools, mother tongue had been the medium of instruction at junior primary prior to 1975. In 1976 the policy of teaching half the curriculum in Afrikaans, and the other half in English, was to be introduced. Students going up from primary had to learn two new languages – which is an impossibility.

This was the scene created by the apartheid regime prior to the June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 events.

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## **Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974:**

Forced all black schools to use Afrikaans and English in a 50–50 mix as languages of instruction

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# Mobilisation in Soweto

Teachers saw that rote learning and cramming were the only skills really being developed and assessed by the Bantu Education system.

“You had a teapot full with tea. There’s this empty mug or empty cup which is the student and all you do is pour into it until it is full.” (Fikile Ngcobo, Soweto teacher)

African parents, journalists, school principals, teachers and even homeland leaders opposed the imposition of Afrikaans in African schools.

On **3 January 1975**, the **African Teachers’ Association of South Africa (ATASA)** submitted a memorandum to the Department of Bantu Education protesting the ruling that from 1975 Afrikaans and English should be used on 50:50 bases.

On 6 January 1975, The World, the newspaper with the widest circulation in Soweto, endorsed ATASA’s position in its editorial:

“We urge parents to join forces with teachers all over the country and fight the directive.”

In January 1976, there was a school board rebellion in Meadowlands. The board refused to implement the new language policy.

In March, 1976, Passive resistance by pupils began at Phefeni Junior Secondary school.

On 17 May 1976, Phefeni Junior Secondary students went on strike.

The World reported the incident under the banner, ‘Anti-Afrikaans Pupils go on Strike in Soweto’. Here is an extract:

*“Students threatened to beat up their headmaster and threw (Afrikaans) textbooks out of classroom windows in a demonstration against being taught some subjects in Afrikaans. The 600 students from Phefeni Junior Secondary School, Orlando West, then went on strike and refused to attend any classes.”*

On 24 May 1976, the striking students were joined by students from Pimville Higher Primary School and Khulangelwazi Higher Primary School in Diepkloof and on 1 June 1976 the seventh school, Senaoane Junior Secondary School, joined.



Black demonstrators voice their protest against the Government in Soweto, 1976





## Soweto, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976

A student from [Morris Isaacson High School](#), [Teboho "Tsietsi" Mashinini](#), proposed a meeting on 13 June 1976 to discuss what should be done.

On the morning of 16 June 1976, between 10,000 and 20,000 black students walked from their schools to Orlando Stadium for a rally.

Police had barricaded the road along their intended route.

The march continued on another route, eventually ending up near Orlando High School.

The crowd of between 3,000 and 10,000 students made their way towards the area of the school. Students sang and waved placards with slogans such as, "Down with Afrikaans", "Viva Azania" and "If we must do Afrikaans, Vorster must do Zulu".

Police commander Colonel Kleingeld drew his handgun and fired a shot, causing panic and chaos. Students started screaming and running and more gunshots were fired.

The police loosed their dogs on the protesters, who responded by stoning the dogs to death.

The police then began to shoot directly at the children.

One of the first students to be shot dead was 13-year-old Hector Pieterse. He was shot at Orlando West High School and became the symbol of the Soweto uprising.

The police attacks on the demonstrators continued and 23 people, including two white people, died on the first day in Soweto.

Among them was Dr Melville Edelstein, who had devoted his life to social welfare among blacks. He was stoned to death by the mob and left with a sign around his neck proclaiming "Beware Afrikaners".

The June 1976 death toll was 176, at least 23 deaths occurred on the first day. Thousands were injured.

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**Soweto, June 16, 1976:** first two killed are Hector Pieterse (13) and Hastings Ndlovu, the latter shot by Colonel Kleingeld, the officer in charge of the police.

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# Aftermath

1,500 heavily armed police officers were deployed to Soweto on 17 June carried weapons including automatic rifles, stun guns, and carbines.

They drove around in armoured vehicles with helicopters monitoring the area from the sky.

The South African Army (SADF) was also ordered on standby.

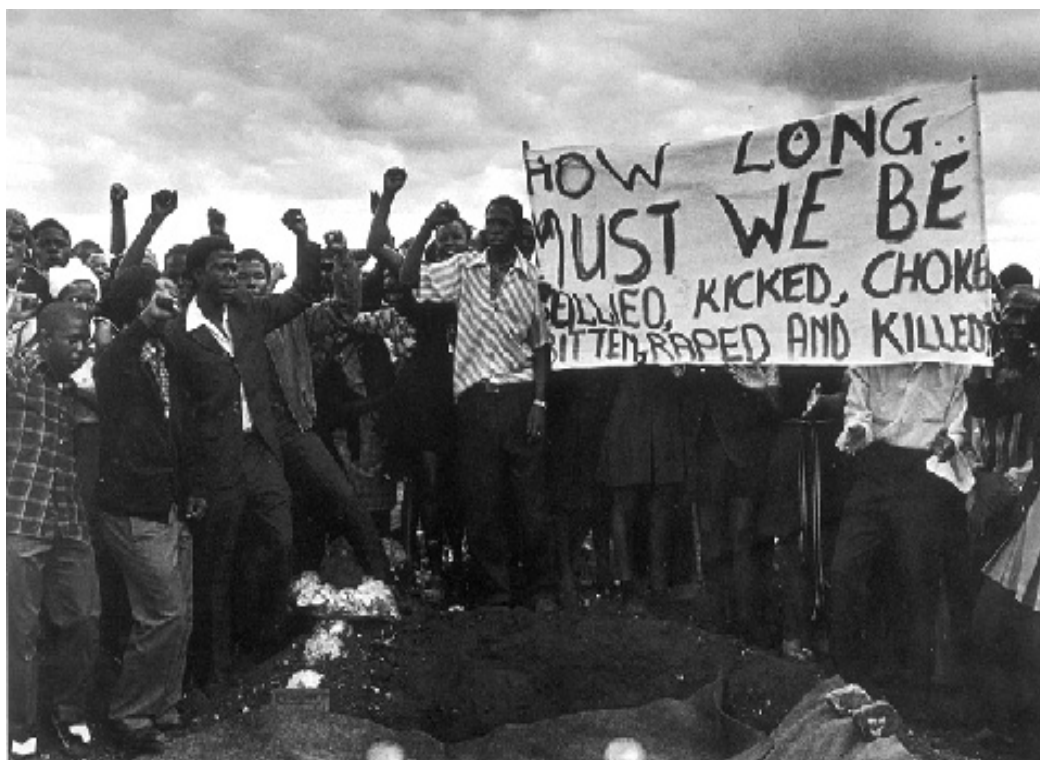
Riots [uprisings] spread to the East Rand, the West Rand, the University of the North, University of Zululand and Alexandra Township, north of Johannesburg, followed that of Soweto.

Many areas were affected including 22 townships in the Transvaal, 16 areas around Cape Town, four townships in Port Elizabeth and nine other towns.

In August 1976 there were strikes in Soweto (stay-aways) by workers in support of the students' demands.

In December, a Black Christmas was declared.

By the end of February 1977 the official death toll, as recorded afterwards by the Cillie Commission of inquiry, stood at 575 – including 75 coloured, two white, two Indian and 496 African people.





# Consequences

Tens of thousands of young people left the country to serve in the liberation movement. Most of them joined the ANC.

The ANC established the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in 1979 in Tanzania to receive the flood of students.

Many got higher education, many joined the military of Mkhonto we Sizwe.

The actions of the students on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976 in Soweto opened a mighty gate that let out the forces of freedom.

Within less than fifteen years from that date, the ANC was unbanned, the SACP was unbanned, and the exiles returned to the country.

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